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**A US Army Formal FAC-A Program is the Solution for Improving
Joint Fires Integration for the Maneuver Commander**

by

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Abstract

Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have once again rekindled the debate about the viability of the aerial FAC. The bottom line is that the FAC(A) is an essential combat multiplier for ground component commanders. The mission, regardless of platform or service, is designed to extend the operational reach of the tactical air control party and ground-based FACs resulting in better air-ground integration. The fact that the mission is performed by an aerial platform only increases flexibility and applicability. Effective employment and utilization of the TACP, FACs, and FAC(A)s ensures air power remains a viable combat multiplier at the forefront of ground commander's minds. Ironically, FAC(A)s are being vastly underutilized in these two current conflicts.

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Convincing senior Army leadership that a formal Army FAC(A) program is the right step is somewhat of a different argument and not the aim of this research effort. The purpose of this paper is to further the efforts to convince the Joint community that a formal Army FAC(A) program makes sense and would greatly improve Joint fires integration for the maneuver commander.

Introduction

FAC(A) duties include detecting and destroying enemy targets, coordinating or conducting target marking, providing terminal control of CAS missions, conducting air reconnaissance, providing artillery and naval gunfire air spotting, providing radio relay for the TACP and FAC, and performing BDA.¹

Military history demonstrates the viability and necessity for the mission of the forward air controller airborne (FAC(A)). Despite the hard fought lessons learned from Vietnam, perhaps lessons lost or lessons being re-learned today, there is still rhetoric concerning the current and future utility of the FAC(A) mission. Unfortunately, discussions about the best platform often rise to the top of current debates about the FAC(A) mission. However, the best platform should not be the crux of the debate. Whether the platform is fixed or rotary wing, manned or unmanned, fast or slow is all worth exploring; however, the current and future needs of the airborne FAC customer should be paramount. The ground component commander could care less about the platform as long as the mission is accomplished. By definition FACs are first “an airborne extension of the TACP,” and in combat, what the Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) or ground commander says always goes.²

It is commonplace to compare the difficulties faced in ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to those in Vietnam. Small wars are much more common throughout our short history than large, full scale, force on force conventional battles. The Army’s white paper on the objective force states:

Respect for our significant capabilities causes our enemy to forego massed formations in favor of smaller dispersed forces with lethal capabilities targeted against strategically significant symbols to generate confusion and encourage tentativeness in our use of force. ... The enemy will resort to decentralized, small-unit operations when it perceives that we have the advantage.³

The Army's idea behind the objective force supports the transformation away from large standing units favoring technology and superior maneuverability. The Army's focus is to field forces capable of fighting an unconventional enemy, fighting in small units interspersed with civilians rather than large massed formations. Although we can ill-afford to allow our ability to defeat a large standing force atrophy in the same manner we did our ability to fight a counter-insurgency after Vietnam, as long as we retain our current military superiority the wars of the future will all be small, limited conflicts. Essential to the success of smaller, more maneuverable forces is the ground commander's ability to provide the correct enablers to achieve the desired effects at the right time and place. The type of weapon, and who delivers it matters not as long as the desired effects are achieved.

Smaller, more dispersed ground units equate to less organic firepower. Less organic fire-power coupled with the ever-growing dependence on precision in a more risk averse culture means the integration of aerial delivered fires will continue to become more predominant and complex. Airborne FACs, from all services, provide the ground commanders the means to effectively command and control joint fires and are pivotal for assisting dispersed ground forces with reconnaissance, terminal control of close air support, detecting and marking or destroying enemy targets, providing radio relay for the tactical air control party (TACP) and FAC, and performing BDA.

The Marine Corps maximizes employment of their airborne FACs and leverages the capabilities of that critical role to accomplish seamless air-ground integration. The Air Force understands the mission and employs it when it deems necessary; however, the skill set has atrophied slightly due to lack of recent employment. Additionally, the Air Force does not have the quantity of FAC(A) trained pilots to meet daily demands in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The

Army does not currently have an active FAC(A) program, though Army attack and cavalry helicopter pilots already perform every function of a FAC(A) with the exception of providing terminal control of close air support. The functions and capabilities of an airborne FAC are resident in the doctrine and training requirements for Army attack and cavalry aviators, to include employment of CAS. In many cases Army aviators are probably better suited to perform the FAC(A) mission because of their close integration into the ground tactical plan at all levels, the situational awareness and understanding that is gained by talking to leaders at the lowest level, and understanding of the ground commander's intent at the brigade level and below. Additionally, simple analysis of battlefield geometry in Iraq and Afghanistan highlights the fact that there are many attack weapons teams (AWT) and scout weapons teams (SWT) all over the country at any given time. If only a percentage of the pilots comprising these crews were FAC(A) qualified, it increases the ground commanders' capability to provide timely, precision joint fires in support of his mission. In an era of risk aversion, it also allows him to have more Type 1 CAS (eyes on) in support of his operations, thus likely minimizing the risk of fratricide and collateral damage. A Formal Army FAC-A program would improve the combat effectiveness of the United States Army, and furthermore, such a program is suitable, feasible, and sustainable within the Army' current force structure.

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Background

At a time when the US Air Force struggles with the duality of fighting the current asymmetric conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and preparing for future conventional major combat operations, many are questioning its relevance to today's joint force commanders. However, this struggle to apply air power in the current fight is not solely an Air Force problem or issue. The Army is facing its fair share of challenges with the duality of fighting a counter

insurgency and simultaneous nation building. In the Air Force's defense, it is very difficult to target for non-kinetic effects and maintain the ability to transition to kinetic at a moment's notice. The roll of the FAC(A) has historically improved the employment of air power for ground force commanders. Likewise, the FAC(A) roll is uniquely suited to streamline and facilitate effective employment of air power during counter-insurgency and stability operations in both Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

There is somewhat of a disconnect at times between the current joint planning cycle and tactical execution timelines at and below the Brigade Combat Team (BCT) level. In many cases, BCTs are executing missions on condensed timelines due to the time sensitivity of the intelligence they are gathering. The time-sensitive nature of the intelligence and targets they wish to prosecute does not allow for the slow, deliberate nature of the current Air Tasking Order (ATO) cycle. Yes, the ATO process is flexible in the sense that there are potentially four or more ATOs in various stages of development or execution at any given time, and the Air Force is very responsive to time sensitive targets using extra CAS sorties in an orbit or various assets on some level of alert status. The disconnect between targeting and execution typically results from not having a certified controller in the right place at the right time. The lack of Joint Forward Air Controllers (JFAC) and Joint Terminal Air Controllers (JTAC) exacerbates the slow nature of the ATO and requests for supporting enablers outside the BCT. It has forced commanders to centrally locate the JTACs at the various tactical command posts and has forced commanders at and below the BCT into more and more Type II and Type III CAS where the JTAC giving the "cleared hot" may be 50 to 100 kilometers away from the actual fight. One obvious alternative to mitigate the lack of air planners and certified JTACs at the BCT level is employment of FAC(A)s. Additionally, BCTs conduct operations below platoon level and having a Soldier at

every echelon capable and certified for terminal control is not feasible. FAC(A) capable aircrews can overcome terminal control issues for patrol leaders who may, or may not have communications with their higher headquarters where the nearest JTAC is located.

The United States Marine Corps arguably have the tightest and most integrated air and ground elements in the world. This concrete relationship between the ground and air components is a result of several things. First, all Marines have the mentality that they are riflemen first and every Marine undergoes infantry training prior to transitioning to their individual specialties. Second, they are a relatively small organization compared to the Army and Air Force, resulting in a much more cohesive collective. Third, and in some respects most important of all, they are a combined arms team. Everything they need from ground power to fixed wing aviation assets is organic. The Marines always train and fight under the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTAF) concept. Due to the close relationship between the Marine air and ground forces, only commissioned Marine aviators performed terminal control for close air support.

Ironically, the one scenario that could have rendered this research effort completely irrelevant and validate the Army FAC-A concept never came to fruition. Instead, it only highlighted many of the issues surrounding current FAC-A ideology and utilization. The First Cavalry Division spent the time, money, and effort to get some of its senior AH-64D (Apache Longbow Helicopter) pilots trained and FAC(A) certified prior to its deployment to Iraq. They practiced and validated their concept for employment and utilization at the Joint Readiness Training Center during their Mission Readiness Exercise before deploying. However, the one instance in theater when one of these Army FAC-As almost gave the “cleared hot” to a couple of A-10s, the attack was aborted by a JTAC that was not on-scene, but dozens of kilometers from

the fight.⁴ While it is likely the JTAC made a mistake in this situation, it definitely highlights how distance from the fight can degrade situational awareness. The JTAC probably made the correct call to abort the attack given their understanding of the situation; however, the result was an opportunity lost in an environment where lost opportunities and second chances for the enemy are ill afforded. The other issue with FAC(A) right now, highlighted by this same scenario, is that virtually nobody is doing FAC(A) work in either theater due to restrictive ROE and in-theater procedures and the perception that it is more risky.⁵ The fact of the matter is the converse is true, employment of FAC(A)s actually reduces risk through better situational awareness coupled with an aerial perspective. Additionally, one must wonder how much service parochialisms enter into the issue of Army aviators performing FAC(A) duties. After all, the Army has said for years that they do not do CAS and there is the inherent issue of who is controlling whose assets. Although the Army did not perform the mission in theater after this incident, their efforts lend credibility to the idea that there is a viable need for FAC(A)s and that Army rotary wing pilots have the requisite competencies to be certified in accordance with the joint standards.

DOCS

Current Doctrine

Current doctrine, to a degree, underwhelms the importance of airborne FACs. It dismisses the concept and daily application of such an important skill-set by categorizing it as a capability to be employed in “rare circumstances.” All of the services are attempting to apply the current joint doctrine as evidenced by the current backlog in JTAC schools. Joint Publication 3-09.3, Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Close Air Support (CAS), states:

Units and organizations that have a reasonable expectation to conduct terminal attack control in order to accomplish their assigned missions need to have individuals available trained to the appropriate standards to perform this activity (e.g., JTACs).

However, experience has shown that there has, and will likely continue to be instances where terminal attack control will be requested by personnel/units that do not have JTACs present. In rare circumstances, the ground commander might require CAS when no JTAC is available. One reason for this would be as a result of unforeseen consequence of combat operations. In these instances, JTACs, FAC(A)s, and/or CAS aircrews should attempt to assist these personnel/units to the greatest extent possible to bring fires to bear in support of their combat operations.⁶

Despite the services best efforts and intentions, the truth remains that supply has not caught up with demand for joint terminal attack controllers (JTACs). As a result, today's contemporary operating environment has turned "rare circumstances" into commonplace. We are clearly forced to rely on JTACs at other locations when perhaps the better answer is to train up Army FAC-As and have greater access to on-scene FACs.

To best understand the Army / Air Force relationship, with respect to close air support (CAS) and command and control (C2), a brief description of the Theater Air Control System (TACS) and the Army Air Ground System (AAGS) is required. "TACS provides the COMAFFOR the capability to plan and conduct joint air operations."⁷ Whereas, "AAGS coordinates and integrates both Army component aviation support and air support with Army ground maneuver."⁸ Together, TACS and AAGS should work together to optimize an airspace support picture commensurate with the ground tactical plan. However, according to the same doctrine that defines both, "When appropriate, AAGS may be clearly related to and interconnected with the ASAFTACS. Together these systems are known as 'TACS/AAGS.'"⁹ Unfortunately, in spite of this well-designed system, there has always been key differences in the tactics, techniques, and procedures between the employment of CAS and Army attack aviation. Army aviation elements are generally under operational control (OPCON) to a ground maneuver commander in a supporting role. Air Force assets are typically OPCON to the Joint Forces Air Component Commander supporting efforts in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Air Force assets are

further distributed to the land component commander for CAS execution. The biggest difference is that while the Air Force and other services use CAS joint tactics, techniques and procedures (JTTP) as spelled out in JP 3-09.3, the Army normally uses close combat attack procedures. The primary distinction between the two methods of attack is the use of a JTAC or FAC to terminally control CAS as opposed to Army aviators directing their own fires working directly with the on-scene commander. This key difference has separated the Army's attack aviation community from the rest of the CAS community. The JTTP implementation of CAS may not be well suited to today's distributed "small team" environment that dominates Iraq and Afghanistan due to the limited JTACs across asymmetric battlefields. One of the solutions to this problem would be the proliferation of qualified and current Army FAC-As roaming these operating areas. Thus, the TACS/AAGS doesn't necessarily need retooling, but we have a great supply of Army attack and scout aircraft that could make the FAC(A) part of the TACS/AAGS much more robust.

Anecdotally, it is disturbing to see how disconnected the air defense airspace management (ADAM) and brigade aviation element (BAE) cells are from the fires cell and tactical air control party within the average brigade tactical operations center (TOC).¹⁰ However, Army Brigade Commanders are organizing their staffs the best they can to support their brigades despite having to fill multiple military transition teams (MiTT) from within their own ranks and still accomplish their military objectives. The fundamental disconnect is what doctrine says should be resident within the BCT to command and control airspace assets and what the school houses can sustain. Additionally, the Air Force continues to struggle with the agreed upon manning requirements because of increased "in-lieu-of" taskings. The ADAM/BAE needs a better doctrinal tie-in with the BCT TACP and Fires Cell and the TACP needs to be more robust. Another second order effect of increased manning requirements on the Air Force is fewer

experienced officers available to work in the TACPs and more of the responsibilities are being passed to senior enlisted; although talented lack the aviator's perspective. An easy way to improve the TACP tie-in would be more airborne "extensions" of the TACP that a formal Army FAC-A program would provide.

Terminal attack control is the primary issue at the BCT level. Although every BCT tries to get as many Soldiers Joint Fire Observer (JFO) qualified prior to deployment as possible in order to maximize type II CAS; there remains a certain percentage of the BCT's maneuver elements that do not have qualified JFAC's. The Air Force cannot fill this void due to personnel shortages and the requisite schoolhouses cannot qualify enough army soldiers to meet the current demand. Although there are Army JTACs, most fall within the Special Operations community and in the instructor community at Fort Sill. In doctrinal theory, the tactical air control party (TACP) is the principle Air Force liaison element assigned to Army maneuver elements down to battalion level; however, Army transformation to a modular force structure has created a bubble and made it difficult for the Air Force to keep up with manning requirements. Additionally, it is the responsibility of this battalion level TACP to provide "the primary terminal attack control of CAS in support of ground forces."¹¹

"The [joint terminal attack controller] [J]TAC is the forward Army ground commander's CAS expert," if present.¹² Furthermore, according to doctrine, "The [J]TAC must:

1. Know the enemy situation, selected targets, and location of friendly units.
2. Know the supported unit's plans, position, and needs.
3. Validate targets of opportunity.
4. Advise the commander on proper employment of air assets.
5. Submit immediate requests for CAS.
6. Control CAS with supported commander's approval.
7. Perform [battle damage assessment] BDA."¹³

Without a fully manned TACP at the battalion level, the Army begins to lose the significant

advantage of employing air power, especially CAS. The obvious stop gap is employment of a FAC(A). Although it is more difficult to maintain a habitual relationship to the brigade or battalion, a FAC(A) possesses the same inherent capabilities of a ground terminal attack controller.

The FAC(A) by doctrinal definition is “a specifically trained and qualified aviation officer who exercises control from the air of aircraft engaged in CAS of ground troops. The FAC(A) is normally an airborne extension of the TACP.”¹⁴ FAC(A) responsibilities are identical to the responsibilities of the JTAC listed above. In addition to terminal control responsibilities and extending “the range that the TACP can detect, identify, and destroy targets,” he/she can support a maneuver force that does not have a TACP.¹⁵ As a result, a FAC(A) must possess the ability to coordinate all of the supporting arms with CAS and execute the ground commander’s intent, without help from the TACP.¹⁶

Experience on behalf of the FAC(A) really comes into play when operating independent from a TACP. The FAC(A) becomes a one-man-band that must be familiar with the supported unit’s operations order (OPORD), applicable standard operating procedures (SOP), and the air tasking order (ATO). Additionally, the FAC(A) should coordinate with the supported unit’s AO/ALO and fires coordinator.¹⁷ Not only does the FAC(A) have to familiarize himself with the OPORD, commander’s intent, SOPs, and ATO, but also responsible for briefing the remainder of the squadron/group:

- (a) Ground scheme of maneuver.
- (b) Ground commander’s intent.
- (c) FSCMs [fire support coordination measures].
- (d) Expected operational areas.
- (e) Expected supported unit locations.
- (f) Initial positions of JTACs and other fire support observers.
- (g) Fire Support Plan.
- (h) Target Precedence List.

- (i) Fire support assets.
- (j) SEAD SOP.
- (k) LASER employment plan.
- (l) FAC(A) employment plan.
- (m) CAS assets available.
- (n) FAC(A) assets available.
- (o) Tanker assets available.
- (p) Forward arming and refueling (FARP) locations.
- (q) Routing.
- (r) Control points and initial points (IPs).
- (s) Battle positions (BPs) and holding areas (HAs).
- (t) Communications plan and nets.
- (u) Code words/procedure words (prowords).¹⁸

Despite being a lengthy list, the doctrinal requirements of a FAC(A) are not overwhelming, especially for a seasoned aviator.

Codifying the concepts and responsibilities outlined in the JCAS publication, JP 3-09.3, the services entered into a memorandum of agreement (MOA) that adds specificity to the broad doctrinal concepts. However, the MOA does not discuss prerequisites for becoming a FAC(A) or for entering FAC(A) training. The MOA does clarify and delineate between certification and qualification. A certified FAC(A) has successfully completed the respective services academic curriculum; whereas, a qualified FAC(A) is certified and current on minimum recurring training requirements in their specified airframe.¹⁹ The MOA further details three specific tasks and their corresponding sub-tasks in order to standardize the requirements across all services. The overarching tasks are “CAS plan,” “CAS prep,” and “CAS execution.”²⁰ Lastly, the MOA prescribes the minimum number and type of controls that must be executed in order to maintain FAC(A) qualification.

Although the joint publications and JCAS Action Plan MOA fail to highlight specific prerequisites for entry into FAC(A) training, history and conversations with current FAC(A)s all place a paramount on experience. If the Air Force scenario used for training and qualifying

FAC(A)s is any indicator, there is an enormous emphasis placed on training reconnaissance skills. This is an obvious carry-over from the lessons learned from FAC operations in Vietnam and carried forward by the Marines.

A FAC cannot be trained to perform visual reconnaissance in the same way that he can be taught to fly instruments in school. The fine art of flying VR is learned by practice in the same way one learns to play a musical instrument. The FAC must train his eyes to see key indicators of enemy activity and improve this capability as he goes along.²¹ He must come to know his area of operation like the palm of his hand.²¹

The ability to conduct reconnaissance is definitely a discriminating skill set that separates seasoned pilots from the rest. Piloting the aircraft becomes second nature over time and “air sense,” or one’s ability to acquire situational awareness in the air quickly, increases with experience. “A FAC expends more of his energies and time on visual reconnaissance missions than on any of his other responsibilities.”²² Experience lessens the pilots work-load allowing them to focus more on reconnaissance.

The debate over appropriate FAC(A) platforms typically hinges on the ability to conduct reconnaissance. The counter-point to reconnaissance capability is survivability. History illustrates this point as the Air Force moved from slow FACs to fast FACs and back again. Most FAC(A)s today will argue the perfect platform for FAC(A) duties is one that can survive at slower speeds with extended station times merely to be more effective while conducting “recce.” The Marine Corps answer to the platform debate is extensive use of the UH-1 “Huey” and AH-1 “Cobra” helicopters.

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Why the Army

When looking at the Joint expectations and responsibilities placed on FAC(A)s in the JCAS environment, it certainly makes sense that Army attack and reconnaissance helicopter

communities should play a large role. The Army employs its rotary wing assets as maneuver forces. This results in simple command relationships. Additionally, Army aviation operates using mission-type orders just like our ground maneuver counterparts. The hardest part of the FAC(A)'s duties and responsibilities prior to execution is understanding all of the support assets available, and coordinating with the supported ground commander to ensure they understand the ground scheme of maneuver and commander's intent. All of this is second nature to Army rotary wing because in most cases coordination with supported ground commanders is an ongoing routine. As a maneuver element, the aviation unit has already been integrated with the ground scheme of maneuver. JP 3-09.3 states that the FAC(A) should be able to brief his squadron/group upon completion of liaising with the ground element are already included in the average team brief before every mission and resident in most attack/recon battalion SOPs.

The majority of the tasks associated with functioning as a FAC(A) are already outlined as requirements and standards in TC 1-248 and TC 1 -251, the training circulars for the OH-58D (Kiowa Warrior) and AH-64D (Apache Longbow) respectively. Furthermore, the majority of the tasks are considered 1000 series tasks, which means they are base tasks to be performed by all aviators rated in that particular airframe. Controlling indirect fire assets are as fundamental to an Army attack/recon pilot as starting the aircraft. Additionally, the Commander's Task Lists (CTL) governs the training guidance and can be tailored by the aircrew training program commander to include additional mission tasks as required.

In addition to being doctrinally compatible, the Army brings two FAC(A) viable platforms to the table. From a communications standpoint, the argument could be made that the Army's platforms are superior to those currently employed by the Air Force. This is largely due to the fact our helicopters are deployed in teams, effectively doubling the communications

capability of any one singular platform. Additionally, Army helicopters stay in constant radio communications directly with the supported ground commander or command designated representative because they operate in that commander's airspace. Thus, their situational awareness within that supported commander's battlespace is probably better than any other asset on the battlefield.

Aside from communications capabilities, the profile flown in by Army aviation is optimal for reconnaissance. After all, one of the primary mission essential tasks for every attack/recon battalion is perform reconnaissance. The fundamentals of reconnaissance and aerial observation are beat into every pilots head from the time they first strap into their aircraft. Both aircraft's sensors were designed for reconnaissance and optimized to detect, locate, identify and designate enemy targets. Both the Apache and Kiowa Warrior are two-pilot aircraft providing more eyes for better reconnaissance capability and two individuals to reduce pilot work load. The Navy and Marines two-seat aircraft to perform the FAC(A) mission for the same reasons.

Aircraft capabilities and training aside, the Army has a wealth of experienced aviators. The Air Force is currently struggling to give pilots back-to-back tours of utilization in their primary aircraft because of other requirements for officers. On the other hand, the Army's Warrant Officer Corp stays with their advanced aircraft throughout their career. Even in staff positions, the average Warrant Officer is never completely away from the cockpit. The result is Senior Warrant Officers far more flying hours and hands-on flying experience than most of the qualified FACs from the other services. If experience is the weak link in developing more FAC(A)s, the Army has plenty.

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Recommendations

There is not one single doctrinal reason why the Army should not have a FAC(A)

program. An Army program would help overcome the current shortage of JTACs and FACs felt across the formation today. Additionally, the Army's structure and aviator management practices are conducive to continually growing the discipline and sustaining the need for qualified FAC(A)s.

Every Army aviator should attend the Joint Fire Power Course, or equivalent, upon graduation from flight school. This would ensure everyone has a working knowledge and understanding of CAS considerations and employment.

Future expansion of a FAC(A) program within the Army could lead to a specialized track for Warrant Officers just like, maintenance test pilot, instructor pilot, safety, or tactical operations (TACOPS).

The apparent long pole in the tent for maintaining a program is availability of controls to maintain qualification and currency. The Air Force has difficulty generating enough sorties to sustain their own program, and the Marines are surely feeling the same pressure given the current operational tempo on all of the services; however, concessions could be made and formalized within the Joint Memorandum of Agreement that would help all services with availability of controls. All of the Joint Training Centers, like JRTC and NTC, could incorporate CAS controls during live fire training and situational training exercises.

All of the service need to ensure "jointness" is at the forefront of acquisition endeavors. As the services become more interdependent, and dependent upon technology, systems such as Link-16 must be able to function across service lines.

Lastly, JP 3-09.3 Fig II-2, "Component Air Command and Control Agencies for Close Air Support," needs to change to reflect FAC(A) capability within the Army. The fact that the Army is not included in this chart is inconsistent with the remainder of the document and

discussions about FAC(A). Nothing else in the publication limits the Army from performing the duties of a FAC(A).

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Conclusion

The need for and reliance on aerial observers began as early as World War I. Born of necessity the aerial observer quickly began enabling ground commanders. Aircraft technology grew rapidly and as capabilities increased the role of the aerial observer expanded. Although true FAC(A) type responsibilities of controlling CAS did not emerge until the Korean War, the integration of aerial observers, ground FACs, and CAS platforms evolved and demonstrated effectiveness throughout World War II. Ironically, the Air Force's focus on the strategic aspect of air power and considerable disregard for tactical application is what led to the concept of an airborne FAC. While the Marine Corps focused on the needs of the ground commander and staffed FACs down to battalion level in order to facilitate coordination of CAS platforms on the front lines, the Air Force only manned TACPs down to the Army regiments. This did little to enable the ground commanders in employing CAS. Artillery was actually the preferred and primary source of fire support because it was more timely and easier to coordinate.²³ As a result the Air Force ground FACs soon yielded to their more maneuverable aerial counterparts.

The lessons learned through the Korean War were never codified into doctrine between the Air Force and Army once hostilities ended. Likewise, during the Vietnam War the aerial FAC proved indispensable for the ground commanders. Complacency, shifting priorities, and wishful thinking caused all the services, except the Marine Corps, to ignore all of the lessons learned about effective air- ground integration in an unconventional war. The Army and Air Force readily accepted the posture that we would never fight another war like Vietnam and in the conventional fight there is a mutually exclusive role for the Air Force and one for the Army. The

Cold War furthered this rationale by both services.

Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have once again rekindled the debate about the viability of the aerial FAC. The bottom line is that the FAC(A) is an essential combat multiplier for ground component commanders. The mission, regardless of platform or service, is designed to extend the operational reach of the tactical air control party and ground-based FACs resulting in better air-ground integration. The fact that the mission is performed by an aerial platform only increases flexibility and applicability. Effective employment and utilization of the TACP, FACs, and FAC(A)s ensures air power remains a viable combat multiplier at the forefront of ground commander's minds. Ironically, FAC(A)s are being vastly underutilized in these two current conflicts.

Army aviation, attack and reconnaissance in particular, is ideally suited to perform the FAC(A) mission. As a maneuver force, Army aviation is integral to the ground scheme of maneuver and directly tied in with ground forces. The relationship between Army rotary wing aviation and supported ground elements closely resembles the relationship between the Marine Corps air and ground forces; the standard bearer for FAC(A) progression, implementation, and execution. Additionally, current Army doctrine and training for attack and reconnaissance units and pilots already encompasses the tasks necessary to function as a FAC(A). Minor changes to the commander's task list (CTL) and modifications to training and progression plans could fully incorporate the joint standards for FAC(A)s. Formalizing the process and sharing of resources, to include schools, is all that is required to have enough joint qualified FAC(A)s to truly enable the ground commander's and affect effective employment of CAS on the contemporary battle field.

Joint mindedness is the battle-cry of senior leaders across the services. One step toward

joint air-ground integration is every service capable of training airborne FACs should do so. At the end of the day it does not matter which service controls what joint asset; all that matters is that the ground commander's intent is met and the desired effects are had at the right time and place.

Endnotes

¹ *Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One FAC(A) Handbook*, 3.

² Ibid.

³ *White Paper, Concept for the Objective Force, Concept Summary*, 2.

⁴ These statements are based on conversation had with a former DOTD/USAAWC chief, referencing an after action review filed by 1st CAV upon their return from theater and corroborated by an Air Force member of DOTD who had discussed this event with the actual pilot.

⁵ These statements are based on a discussion had with a former DOTD/USAAWC chief.

⁶ JP 3-09.3, I-2.

⁷ Ibid, II-3.

⁸ Ibid, II-8.

⁹ Ibid, II-9.

¹⁰ Based on 2 years worth of personally observing ADAM/BAE cells and their interaction with the supporting Army aviation Task force at the Joint Readiness Center.

¹¹ JP 3-09.3, II-9.

¹² Ibid, II-10.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, III-30.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, III-31.

¹⁸ Ibid, III-31-32.

¹⁹ JCAS AP MOA 2004-2, 4-5.

²⁰ JCAS AP MOA.

²¹ Lieutenant Colonel George I. Wilkins, The FAC Factor in South Vietnam, Air War College Thesis, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, November 1970, 12.

²² Visual Reconnaissance Bulletin # 69, PACAF Tactics and Techniques Bulletin, PACAF, Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, 18 October 1967, 1.

²³ Robert F. Futrell, *Ideas, concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the US Air Force, 1907-1964* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1971), 182-203.

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